

# *Dance Index*





The Dance. Carpeaux. Paris

The original plaster is in the Louvre; the stone-carving adorns the face of the National Academy of Music and Dance on the Place de l'Opéra.

# *Dance Index*

*Managing Editor*

MARIAN EAMES

*Editors*

LINCOLN KIRSTEIN  
PAUL MAGRIEL  
DONALD WINDHAM

## *Dance in Sculpture*

Dancing as a formal expression, a language like music or architecture, is based on geometry and human anatomy. The machine of the body, a trunk supported on two flexible columns, carrying two arms and a head, moves in a restricted space, defying both ordinary conditions of daily movements and gestures, as well as the pull of gravity. This incredibly complex apparatus turns, bends, jumps and falls. To achieve this, and, at the same time enhance a sense of theatre inherent in such defiance of habit, certain positions have been found, accomodating bones and muscles to propel them through space. And then, after a technique has been established, a style also is found to have been simultaneously imposed, a manner in moving, rising from technique itself, an ele-

gance or pathos of movement, based on an economy of means required to gain brilliance or control in the physical display. This style, exalted, noble or tragic, depends on plasticity,—the sense of the isolated body, released in air, moving through its own spaces. The very fact that a body is free-standing, detached from any background, already indicates or promises movement. It is difficult to think of *sculptured* landscape, except as background, or sculptured still-life except as decorative accessory. But the human body is the great subject for sculpture in the round, and all relief tends towards the round, low or high. With the bodies of the other animals, but of greater interest due to its humanity, its machinery can be endlessly imagined in its metamorphosis of movement.

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### LA DANSE by Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux 1827-1875

Carpeaux received the commission for the adornment of the new Opéra, designed by Charles Garnier in 1864. His work was considered indecent. Someone threw a pot of ink at it. The newspapers screamed "Ignoble orgy," "Delirium tremens," "Women abandoning themselves to actual epileptic fits." Charles Blanc, an official critic wrote, "It is an enormous mistake to believe that one can only give life to flesh by making it breathe and palpitate, by stamping upon it a feverish thumb, a trembling touch. The sculptor may doubtless define the voluptuousness of forms, but not the voluptuousness of flesh."

*Covers:* Bala Krsna. Copper. South India, XVI century (?) Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
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Ritual dancer. Bronze. Etruscan, archaic period. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Ritual dancer. Terra cotta. Mexican, archaic period. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design .



Dancing Apsaras. Gray sandstone. Cambodian, XII century. Section of lintel from the Bayon of Angkor Thom. Cleveland Museum of Art

Figures can be thought of as dancing on a stage, a limited space tracked across with charted movements, almost as figures are locked inside a block of stone, awaiting the chisel to release them into their supple plastic fixity. Sculpture of dancing rarely tells us much about individual dancers, or even about the theatre in which they danced. However, some great individual pieces afford us a deep insight into the essence of plastic balance and flow, without which stage dancing is invisible. It is almost a paradox that the finest figures in Western art exist in the seemingly more inflexible medium of cut stone, while the East, whose formal movements seem to us so much more static and less violent than our own, has made its masterworks in fluid bronze. Western sculptors have caught the twisting body and its flowing drapery, disturbed by broken air, to suggest motion itself. It is as if, in some Roman and Renaissance figures, the disruption of currents of air were indicated, rather than the body that disturbed them. In Eastern art, on the contrary, gesture is the prize,—the absolute immobility of the divine body, released in frozen space. A gesture is chosen on a peak of fury or serenity to symbolize perfect equilibrium, even in anger, the arrest of motion at the heart of movement, the perfect silence in the core of

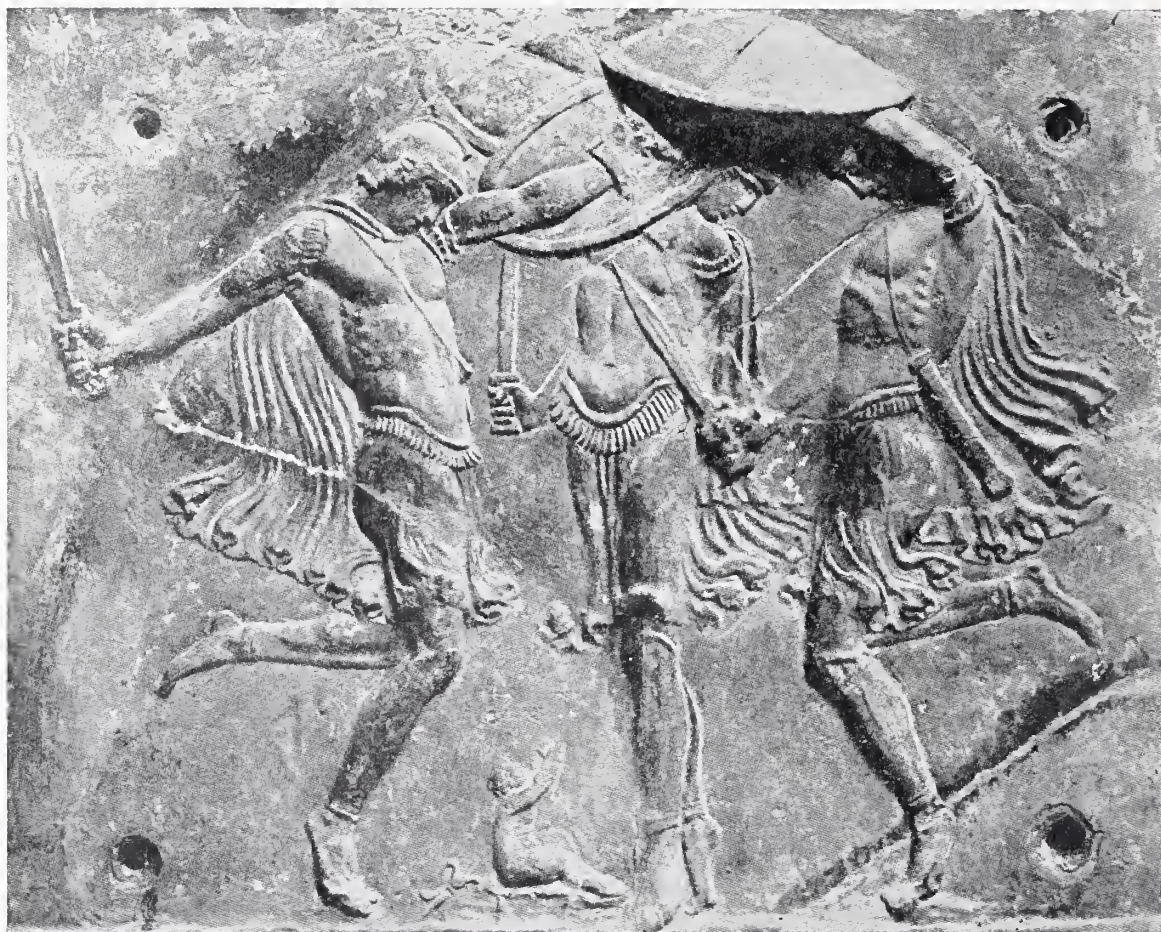
sound. The gestures chosen by Western artists, even in their most formal representations of theatrical dancing resemble other types of freer movement,—running, leaping, sportive thrusts and retractions. These are movements also used in stage dancing, but they are seldom so stylized in our sculpture. Our interest has been in the attempt to synthesize the shift in weight or motion. In the Orient, the gestures selected could only be those of dancers, arranged, deliberate, implacable, from whose authority the slightest trace of improvisation has been deleted. Yet in both East and West, there is the common bridge of dominating preoccupation,—the human body. If it is clad, it is only draped or adorned; it is not costumed. Costume does not count; cloth only masks the silhouette. Perhaps that is why there are so few interesting figures of European dancing after the Renaissance. Dancing was considered as increasingly theatrical, hence costumed. Only in porcelain, on a tiny scale, does the panniered skirt have some life, which is still inconsiderable compared to Watteau or Lancret. And even in the nineteenth century, there are only Carpeaux and Degas,—the one who rediscovered the vitality of the nude, the other who discovered the mysterious pathos in the fusion of anatomy, geometry and tradition, which is the classic ballet.

L.K.





Kinnara, dancing. Copper. Siamese, late XVIII-early IX century. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Kuretes, dancing. Marble, Roman, (Campagna)

Those who pay homage to the Gods by dance,  
In battle are the first to hurl the lance. 6

*Socrates*

The Dance was developed among men under the direct guidance of the Gods.

*Plato*



- A: Who is this?  
B: A Bacchant.  
A: And who carved her?  
B: Scopas.  
A: And who made her frenzied,  
Bacchus or Scopas?  
B: Scopas.

*Simonides: Planudean Appendix 60*

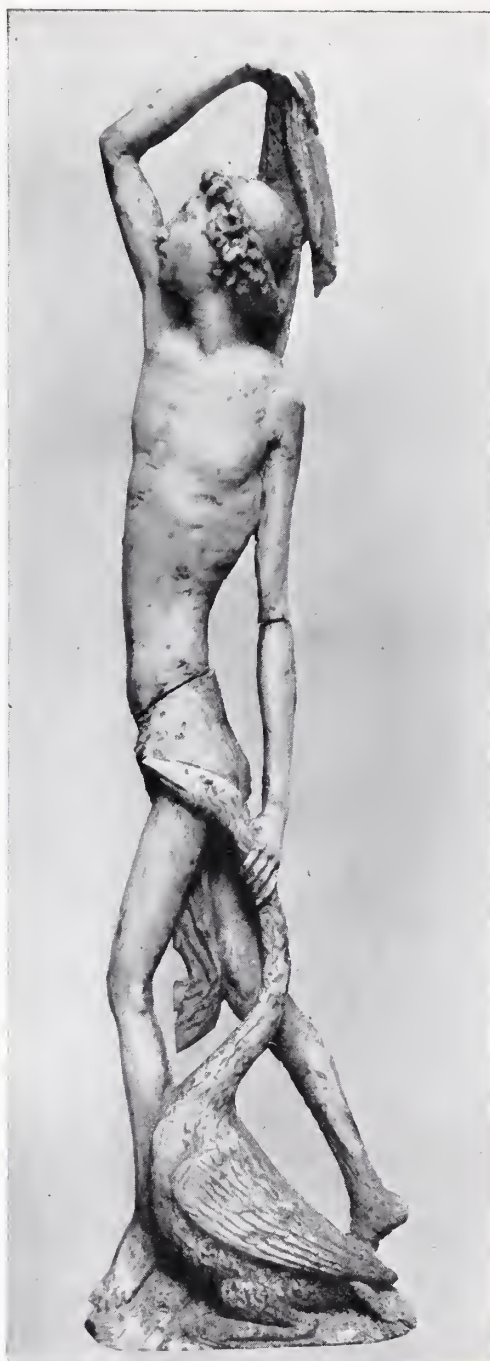
Not Nature, but Art, made the Bacchant frenzied, mixing madness with the stone.

Hold the Bacchant, lest, though she be stone, she leap over the threshold and escape from the temple.

*(The Planudean Appendix)  
Paulus Silentiarius:  
Greek Anthology 57, 58.*



Maenad. Pentellic marble. Roman copy of Greek original (late V century), by Kallimachos (?). Metropolitan Museum of Art

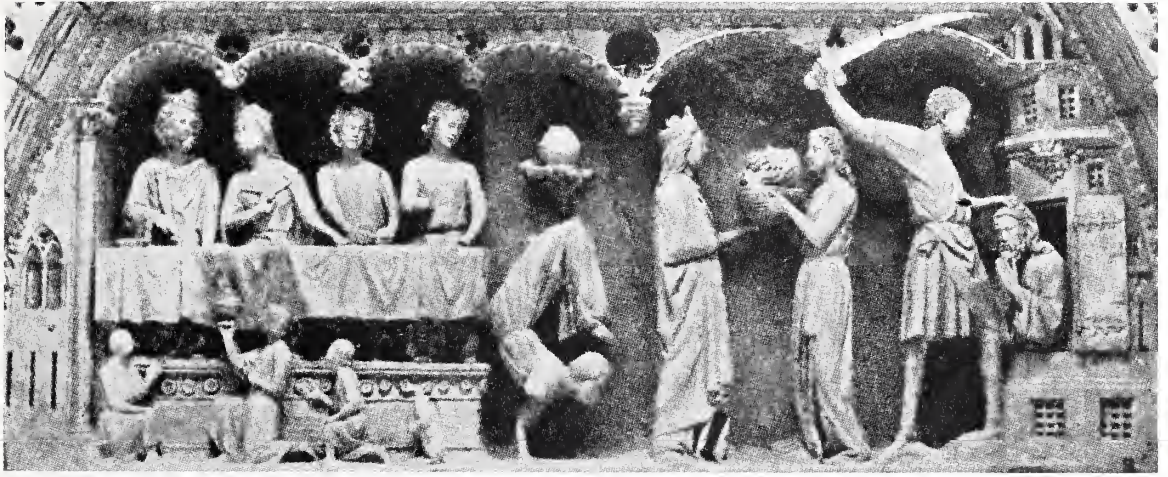


Dancing Youths. Bone furniture ornaments. Egyptian-Christian, IV-V century. Collection: The Brummer Gallery

One dance, one song for men and angels, for man and God are become one.

*Book I, 39: Agathias Scholasticus; Christian Epigrams of the Greek Anthology. (Palatine Anthology)*





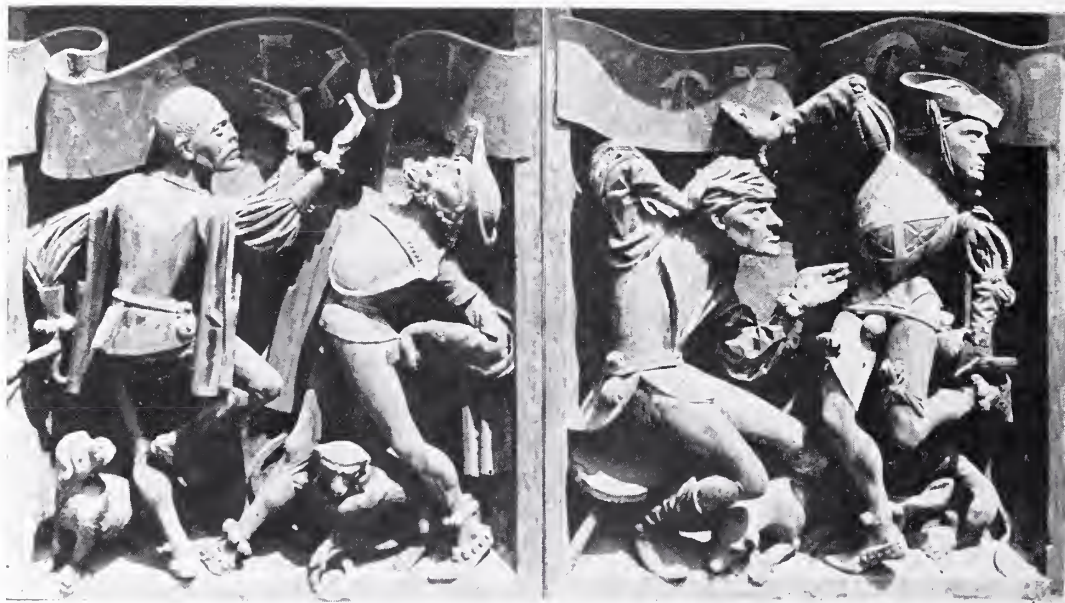
Salome, dancing. Rouen Cathedral. XII century

“She threw herself onto her hands, with her heels in the air, scoured the dais thus like a large beetle, and then stopped abruptly. Her neck and spine were at right angles; the sheaths of color round her legs went on like rainbows over her shoulders and framed her face, at a cubit from the ground. Her lips were painted, her eyebrows were deep black, and the eyes themselves almost terrifying. There were beads of moisture on her forehead like a vapour on white marble. She did not speak, but she and Herod looked at one another.”

*(excerpt from Herodias, by Gustave Flaubert.)*

In the Middle Ages women dancers or glee-maidens were also tumblers. Salome is frequently shown on her hands (“When the daughter of Herodyas was in comyn, and had tomblyde and pleside Harowde”), and a pious French writer of the thirteenth century attributed John the Baptist’s death to the “well-skilled tumbling and cheating tricks” of that dancing-girl.





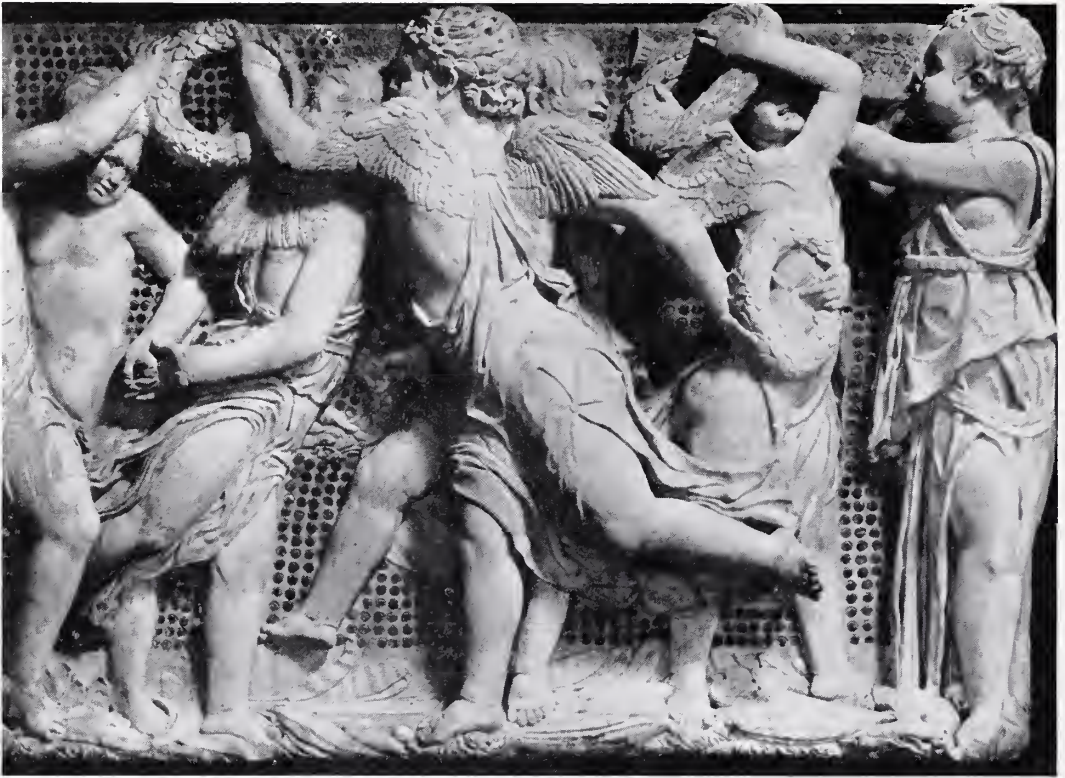
Medieval dancers. Painted stone. German, 1500. Inn of the **Goldene Dachel**, Innsbruck

There were dances involving a blindfolded man who would pass back and forth between eggs laid on the ground, without breaking them. This was alternated with a sword-dance, where knives, their handles stuck in the earth, blades up, were missed by nimble feet. There was also slack-rope walking and dancing, even dancing on stilts. There is hardly a one of these semi-acrobatic dances which did not have an antique precedent. (Remember the tumblers in the *Iliad*, and the Greek stilt-dancers who wore pink skin-tights, and were called *gypones*.) The minstrel-dancer had considerable skill, of a somewhat grotesque sort, to be sure, but nevertheless of a definitely spectacular and theatrical nature.

I can play the lute, the violin, the pipe, the bagpipe, the syrinx, the harp, the gigue, the gittern, the symphony, the psaltery, the organistrum, the regals, the tabor and the rote. I can sing a song well, and make tales and fables. I can tell a story against any man. I can make love verses to please young ladies, and can play the gallant for them if necessary. Then I can throw knives into the air, and catch them without cutting my fingers. I can do dodges with string, most extraordinary and amusing. I can balance chairs and make tables dance. I can throw a somersault, and walk on my head.

*(excerpt from "Les Deux Menèstriers," The Digby manuscript)*





Cantoria (detail). Marble. Donatello, 1433-1439. Museo dell'Opera, Florence

Carlo Blasis, the great Milanese choreographer and ballet pedagogue published his "Code of Terpsichore" in 1830, and established the position of the *attitude*:

"On one occasion, performing the part of Mercury, I took, as I turned in my pirouette, the attitude of the statue of Mercury by J. Bologne. This fine position is very difficult to stand in. Unless a dancer is naturally arched, he can never do it well, and the pirouette (*en attitude*) loses its effect. The body must lean forward, and the right arm developpe (*sic*) itself almost entirely. The leg that is in attitude must be bent, and by its motion accompany the rounding contour of the position of the body. To render this attitude yet more graceful let the dancer stretch out his left arm, in which the *caduceus* is held; this takes off the angle at the elbows that it would otherwise present, and gives the pirouette much more elegance."



Saint Basil advised his subjects to practice dancing on earth for it is the principal occupation of angels in Heaven



MERCURY by Giovanni da Bologna 1524-1608

Jean de Douai was a Flemish sculptor who worked in Florence and Bologna. Influenced by Michaelangelo, he went to Florence in 1554, and was patronized by the Medici, for whom he made the Mercury, formerly in their Florentine palace, and now in the Bargello. A version of it is now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Dancer, Porcelain, Venetian, ca. 1750. (Louis XIV style) Collection: George Chaffee

Fanny Elssler's dancing is quite different from the academic idea, it has a particular character which sets her apart from all other dancers; it is not the aerial and virginal grace of Taglioni, it is something more human, more appealing to the senses.

Undoubtedly, spiritualism is a thing to be respected; but, as regards dancing, we can quite well make some concessions to materialism. After all, dancing consists of nothing more than the art of displaying beautiful shapes in graceful positions and the development from them of lines agreeable to the eye; it is mute rhythm, music that is seen.

*Théophile Gautier*



FANNY ELSSLER by A. Barre. Bronze statuette, 1837. Collection: George Chaffee.





Ballet girl. Bronze (tarlatan skirt). Edgar Degas, 1865-81. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

True dancing, like true wit, is best express'd  
By nature only to advantage dress'd;  
'Tis not a nimble bound, or caper high,  
That can pretend to please a curious eye;  
Good judges no such tumblers tricks regard,  
Or think them beautiful because they're hard.



Kneeling Dancer. Bronze. Elie Nadelman, ca. 1922. Courtesy: M. Knoedler

'Tis not enough that ev'ry stander-by  
No glaring errors in your steps can spy;  
The dance and music must so nicely meet,  
Each note should seem an echo to your feet;  
A nameless grace must in each movement dwell,  
Which words can ne'er express, or precepts tell;

(from *"The Art of Dancing"* by Soame Jenyns. 1729)



Ruth St. Denis. Plaster. Gaston Lachaise, ca. 1910. Collection: The Knoedler Galleries





The Dragonfly (Anna Pavlova). Dresden porcelain. Anna Pavlova, ca. 1920. Museum of Modern Art, Department of Theatre Design



Mary Wigman. Dresden porcelain. Victor Magito, ca. 1930  
Collection: David McKibbin (Photograph, Solatia Taylor)

*Pas d'action,  
peu de sauce*

Daft Dathy of the Five Positions (the death ray stop him!) is still, as reproaches Paulus, on the Madderhorn and, entre chats and hobnobs,\*

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\* Go up quick, stay so long, come down slow.

The hammers are telling the cobbles, the pickts are hacking the saxums, it's snugger to burrow abed than ballet on Broadway.

—Dawncing the kniejinsky choreopiscopally like an easter sun round the colander, the vice! Taranta boontoday. You should pree him prance the polcat, you whould sniff him wops around, you should hear his piedigrotts schraying as his skimpies skirp a . . .

—Crashedafar Corumbas! A Czardanser indeed! Dervilish glad too. Ortovito semi ricordo. The pantaglionic affection through his blood like a bad influenza in a leap at bounding point?

—Out of Prisky Poppagenua, the palsied old priamite, home from Edwin Hamilton's Christmas pantaloonade, *Oropos Roxy and Pantharhea* at the Gaiety, trippudiating round the aria, with his fiftytwo heirs of age! They may reel at his likes but it's Noeh Bonum's shin do.

(*excerpts from "Finnegans Wake," by James Joyce. The Viking Press*)



Seated Ballet. Bronze on plaster. Mary Callery, 1946. Collection: The Buchholz Gallery



